Catherine Carmichael; Or Three Years Running

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1878

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Paula Simões

CHRISTMAS DAY. NO. 1.

CATHERINE CARMICHAEL, whose name is prefixed to this story, was very early in her life made acquainted with trouble. That name became hers when she was married, but the reader must first know her as Catherine Baird. Her father was a Scotchman of good birth, and had once been possessed of fair means. But the world had gone against him, and he had taken his family out to New Zealand when Catherine was as yet but ten years old. Of Mr. Baird and his

misfortunes little need be said, except that for nearly a dozen years he followed the precarious and demoralizing trade of a gold-digger at Hokitika. Sometimes there was money in plenty, sometimes there was none. Food there was, always plenty, though food of the roughest. Drink there was, generally, much more than plenty. Everything around the young Bairds was rough. Frequently changing their residence from one shanty to another, the last shanty inhabited by them would always be the roughest. As for the common decencies of life, they seemed to become ever scarcer and more scarce with them, although the females among them had a taste for decency, and although they lived in a region which then seemed to be running over with gold. The mother was ever decent in language, in manners, and in morals, and strove gallantly for her children. That they could read and write, and had some taste for such pursuits, was due to her; for the father, as years passed over him, and as he became more and more hardened to the rough usages of a digger's life, fell gradually into the habits of a mere miner. A year before his death no one would have thought he had been the son of Fergus Baird, Esq., of Killach, and that when he had married the daughter of a neighbouring laird, things had smiled,pleasantly on him and his young wife.

Then his wife died, and he followed her within one year. Of the horrors of that twelve months it is useless now to tell. A man's passion for drink, if he be not wholly bad, may be moderated by a wife, and then pass all bounds when she is no longer there to restrain

him. So it was with him; and for a while there was danger that it should be so with his boys also. Catherine was the eldest daughter, and was then twenty-two. There was a brother older, then four younger, and after them three other girls. That year to Catherine was very hard,—too hard, almost, for endurance. But there came among them at the diggings, where they were still dwelling, a young man whose name was John Carmichael, whose presence there gave something of grace to her days. He, too, had come for gold and had joined himself to the Bairds in consequence of some distant family friendship.

Within twelve months the father of the family had followed the mother, and the eight children were left without protection and without anything in the world worthy of the name of property. The sons could fight for themselves, and were left to do so. The three younger children were carried back to Scotland, a sister of their mother's having undertaken to maintain them; but Catherine was left. When the time came in which the three younger sisters were sent, it was found that a home presented itself for Catherine; and as the burden of providing for even the younger orphans was very great, it was thought proper that Catherine should avail herself of the home which was offered her.

John Carmichael, when he came among the diggers at Hokitika,—on the western coast of the southern of the two New Zealand islands,—had done so chiefly because he had quarrelled with his cousin, Peter

Carmichael, a squatter settled across tho mountains in the Canterbury Province, with whom he had been living for the last three or four years. This Peter Carmichael, who was now nearly fifty, had for many years been closely connected with Baird, and at one period had been in partnership with him at the diggings. John had heard of Baird and Hokitika, and when the quarrel had become, as he thought, unbearable, he had left the Canterbury sheep-farm, and had tried his fortune in a gold-gully.

Then Baird died, and what friends there were laid their heads together to see how best the family should be maintained. The boys, and John Carmichael with them, would stick to the gold. Word came out from the aunt in Scotland that she would do what was needed. Let the burden not be made too heavy for her. If it were found necessary to send children home, let them, if possible, be young. Peter Carmichael himself came across the mountains to Hokitika and arranged things for the journey;—and before he left, he had arranged things also for Catherine. Catherine should go with him across the mountains, and live with him at Mount Warriwa,—as his home was called,—and be his wife.

Catherine found everything to be settled for her almost before she was able to say a word as to her own desire in the matter. It was so evident that she could not be allowed to increase the weight of the burden which was to be imposed upon the aunt at home! It was so evident that her brothers were not able to find a home for her! It was so evident that she could not live alone in that wild country! And it

seemed also to be quite evident that John Carmichael had no proposition of his own to make to her! Peter Carmichael was odious to her, but the time was such that she could not allow herself to think of her own dislikings.

There had never been a word of overt outspoken love between John Carmichael and Catherine Baird. The two were nearly of an age, and, as such, the girl had seemed to be the elder. They had come to be friends more loving than any other that either had. Catherine, in those gloomy days, in which she had seen her father perishing and her brothers too often straying in the wrong path, had had much need of a friend. And he had been good to her, keeping himself to sober, hard-working ways, because he might so best assist her in her difficulties. And she had trusted him, begging him to watch over the boys, and to help her with the girls. Her conduct had been beyond all praise; and he also,—for her sake following her example,—had been good. Of course she had loved him, but of course she had not said so, as he had not chosen to speak first.

Then had come the second death and the disruption. The elder Carmichael had come over, and had taken things into his own hands. He was known to be a very hard man, but nevertheless he spent some small sums of money for them, eking out what could be collected from the sale of their few goods. He settled this, and he settled that, as men do settle things when they have money to spend. By degrees,—not very slowly, but still gradually,—it was notified to Catherine that she might go across the mountains, and become

mistress of Warriwa: It was very little that he said to her in the way of love-making.

“You might as well come home with me, Kate, and I’ll send word on, and we’ll get ourselves spliced as we go through Christchurch.”

When he put it thus clearly to her, she certainly already knew what was intended. Her elder brother had spoken of it. It did not surprise her; nor did she start back and say at once that it should not be so.

From the moment in which Peter Carmichael had appeared upon the scene all Kate’s intimacy with John seemed to come to an end. The two men, whose relationship was distant, did not renew their quarrel. The elder, indeed, was gracious, and said something to his younger kinsman as to the expediency of his returning to Warriwa. But John seemed to be oppressed by the other’s presence, and certainly offered no advice as to Kate’s future life. Nor did Kate say a word to him. When first an allusion to the suggested marriage was made in her presence she did not dare, indeed, to look at him, but she could perceive that neither did he look at her. She did not look but yet she could see. There was not a start, hot a change of colour, not a motion even of her foot. He expressed no consent, but she told herself that, by his silence gave it. There was no need for a question, even had it been possible that she should ask one.

And so it was settled. Peter Carmichael was a just man, in his way, but coarse, and altogether without sentiment. He spoke of the

arrangement that had been made as he might have done of the purchase of a lot of sheep, not, however, omitting to point out that in this bargain he was giving everything and getting almost nothing. As a wife, Catherine might, perhaps, be of some service about the house; but he did not think that he should have cared to take a wife really for the sake of the wife. But it would do. They could get themselves married as they went through Christchurch, and then settle down comfortably. The brothers had nothing to say against it, and to John it seemed to be a matter of indifference. So it was settled. “What did it signify to Catherine, as no one else cared for her?

Peter Carmichael was a hard-working man, who had the name of considerable wealth. But he was said to be hard of hand and hard of heart,—a stern, stubborn man, who was fond only of his money. There had been much said about him between John and Catherine before he had come to Hokitika,—when there had been no probability of his coming. “He is just,” John had said, “but so ungenial that it seems to me impossible that a human being should stay with him.” And yet this young man, of whose love she had dreamt, had not had a word to say when it was being arranged that she should be taken off to live all her future life with this companionship and no other! She would not condescend to ask even a question about her future home. “What did it matter? She must be taken somewhere, because she could not be got rid of and buried at once beneath the sod. Nobody wanted her. She was only a burden.

She might as well be taken to Warriwa and die there as elsewhere,—and so she went.

They travelled for two days and two nights across the mountains to Christchurch, and there they were married, as it happened, on Christmas Day,—on Christmas Day, because they passed that day and no other in the town as they went on. There was a further journey, two other days and two other nights, down nearly to the southern boundary of the Canterbury Province; and thither they went on with no great change between them, having become merely man and wife during that day they had remained at Christchurch. As they passed one great river after another on their passage down Kate felt how well it would be that the waters should pass over her head. But the waters refused to relieve her of the burden of her life. So she went on and reached her new home at Warriwa.

Catherine Carmichael, as she must now be called, was a well-grown, handsome young woman, who, through all the hardships of her young life, still showed traces of the gentle blood from which she had sprung. And ideas had come to her from her mother of things better than those around her. To do something for others, and then something, if possible, for herself,—these had been the objects nearest to her. Of the amusements, of the lightness and pleasures of life, she had never known anything. To sit vacant for an hour dreaming over a book had never come to her; nor had it been for her to make the time run softly with some apology for women's work in her hands. The hard garments, fit for a miner's work, passed through

her hands. The care of the children, the preparation of their food, the doing the best she could for the rough household,—these things had kept her busy from her early rising till she would go late to her bed. But she had loved her work because it had been done for her father and her mother, for her brothers and her sisters. And she had respected herself, never despising the work she did; no man had ever dared to say an uncivil word to Kate Baird among all those rough miners with whom her father associated. Something had come to her from her mother which, while her mother lived,—even while her father lived,—had made her feel herself to be mistress of herself. But all that independence had passed away from her,—all that consciousness of doing the best she could,—as soon as Peter Carmichael had crossed her path.

It was not till the hard, dry, middle-aged man had taken possession of her that she acknowledged to herself that she had really, loved John Carmichael. When Peter had come among them, he had seemed to dominate her as well as the others. He and he only had money. He and he only could cause aught to be done. And then it had seemed that for all the others there was a way of escape open, but none for her. No one wanted her, unless it was this dry old man. The young man certainly did not want her. Then in her sorrow she allowed herself to be crushed, in spite of the strength for which she had given herself credit. She was astounded, almost stupefied, so that she had no words with which to assert herself. When she was told that the hard, dry man would find a home for her, she had no reason to give

why it should not be so. When she did not at first refuse to be taken away across the mountains, she had failed to realize what it all meant. When she reached Warriwa, and the waters in the pathless, unbridged rivers had not closed over her head,—then she realized it.

She was the man's wife, and she hated him. She had never known before what it was to hate a human being. She had always been helpful, and it is our nature to love those we help. Even the rough men who would lure her father away to drink had been her friends. "Oh, Dick," she would say, to the roughest of the rough, putting her hand prayerfully on the man's sleeve, "do not ask him to-night;" and the rough man would go from the shanty for the time. She would have mended his jacket for him willingly, or washed his shirt. Though the world had been very hard to her, she had hated no one. Now, she hated a man with all the strength of her heart, and he was her husband.

It was good for the man, though whether good for herself or not she could never tell, that he did not know that he was hated. "Now, old woman; here you'll have a real home," he said, as he allowed her to jump out of the buggy in which he had driven her all the way from Christchurch; "you'll find things tidier than you ever had 'em away at Hokitika." She jumped down on the yard into which he had driven, with a bandbox in her hand, and passed into the house by a back door. As she did so a very dirty old woman,—fouler looking, certainly, than any she had ever seen away among the gold-diggings, —followed her from the kitchen, which was built apart, a little to the

rear of the house. “So you be the new wife, be ye?” said the old woman.

“Yes; I am Mr. Carmichael’s wife. Are you the servant?” “I don’t know nothing about servants. I does for ’un,—what he can’t do for ’imself. You’ll be doing for ’un all now, I guess.” Then her husband followed her in and desired her to come and help to unload the buggy. Anything to be done was a relief to her. If she could load and unload the buggy night and day it would be better than anything else she could see in prospect before her. Then there came a Maori in a blanket, to assist in carrying the things. The man was soft and very silent,—softly and silently civil, so that he seemed to be a protection to her against the foul old woman, and that lord of hers, who was so much fouler to her imagination.

Then her home life began. A woman can generally take an interest in the little surroundings of her being, feeling that the tables and the chairs, the beds and the linen are her own. Being her own, they are dear to her and will give a constancy of employment which a man cannot understand. She tried her hand at this, though the things were not her own,—were only his. But he told her so often that they were his that she could not take them to her heart. There was not much there for a woman to love; but little as there was, she could have loved it for the man’s sake, had the man been lovable. The house consisted of three rooms, in the centre of which they lived, sleeping in one of the others. The third was unfurnished and unoccupied, except by sheepskins, which, as they were taken by the shepherds

from the carcases of sheep that had died about the run, were kept there till they could be sent to the market. A table or two, with a few chairs; a bedstead with an old feather bed upon it; a washing-basin with a broken jug, with four or five large boxes in lieu of presses, made up nearly all the furniture. An iron pot or two and a frying-pan, with some ill-matched broken crockery, completed the list of domestic goods. How was she to love such as these with such an owner for them?

He had boasted that things were tidier there than she had known them at the diggings. The outside of the house was so, for the three rooms fronting on to the wide prairie-land of the sheep-run had a verandah before them, and the place was not ruinous. But there had been more of comfort in the shanty which her father and brothers had built for their home down in the gold-gully. As to food, to which she was indifferent, there was no question but that it had been belter and more plentiful at the diggings. For the food she would not have cared at all,—but she did care for the way in which it was doled out to her hands, so that at every dole she came fo hate him more. The meat was plentiful enough. The men who took their rations from the station came there and cut it from the sheep as they were slaughtered, almost as they would. Peter would count the sheep's heads every week, and would then know that, within a certain wide margin, he had not been robbed. Could she have made herself happy with mutton she might have lived a blessed life. But of other provisions every ounce was weighed to her, as it was to the station

hands. So much tea for the week, so much sugar, so much flour, and so much salt. That was all,—unless when he was tempted to buy a sack of potatoes by some itinerant vendor, when he would count them out almost one by one. There was a storeroom attached to the kitchen, double-locked, the strongest of all the buildings about the place. Of this, for some month or two, he never allowed her to see the inside. She became aware that there were other delicacies there besides the tea and sugar,—jam and pickles, and boxes of sardines. The station-hands about the place, as the shepherds were called, would come and take the pots and bottles away with them, and Peter would score them down in his book and charge them in his account of wages against the men, with a broad profit to himself. But there could be no profit in sending such luxuries into the house. And then, as the ways of these people became gradually known to her, she learned that the rations which had been originally allowed for Peter himself and the old woman and the Maori had never been increased at her coming. Rations for three were made to do as rations for four. "It's along of you that he's a-starving of us," said the old woman. Why on earth should he have married her and brought her there, seeing that there was so little need for her!

But he had known what he was about. Little though she found for her to do, there was something which added to his comfort. She could cook,—an art which the old woman did not possess. She could mend his clothes, and it was something for him to have some one to speak to him. Perhaps in this way he liked her, though it was as a

man may like a dog whom he licks into obedience. Though he would tell her that she was sulky, and treat her with rough violence if she answered him, yet he never repented him of his bargain. If there was work which she could do, he took care not to spare her,—as when the man came for the sheepskins, and she had to hand them out across the verandah, counting them as she did so. But there was, in truth, little for her to do.

There was so little to do, that the hours and days crept by with feet so slow that they never seemed to pass away. And was it to be thus with her for always,—for her, with her young life, and her strong hands, and her thoughts always full? Could there be no other life than this? And if not, could there be no death? And then she came to hate him worse and worse,—to hate him and despise him, telling herself that of all human beings he was the meanest. Those miners who would work for weeks among the clay,—working almost day and night,—with no thought but of gold, and who then, when gold had been found, would make beasts of themselves till the gold was gone, were so much better than him! Better! why, they were human; while this wretch, this husband of hers, was meaner than a crawling worm! When she had been married to him about eight months, it was with difficulty that she could prevail upon herself not to tell him that she hated him.

The only creature about the place that she could like was the Maori. He was silent, docile, and uncomplaining. His chief occupation was that of drawing water and hewing wood. If there was aught else to

do, he would be called upon to do it, and in his slow manner he would set about the task. About twice a month he would go to the nearest post-office, which was twenty miles off, and take a letter, or, perhaps, fetch one. The old woman and the squatter would abuse him for everything or nothing; and the Maori, to speak the truth, seemed to care little for what they said. But Catherine was kind to him, and he liked her kindness. Then there fell upon the squatter a sense of jealousy,—or feeling, probably, that his wife's words were softer to the Maori than to himself,—and the Maori was dismissed. " What's that for?" asked Catherine sulkily.

"He is a lazy skunk."

"Who is to get the wood?"

"What's that to you? When you were down at Hokitika you could got wood for yourself." Not another word was said, and for a week she did cut the wood. After that, there came a lad who had been shepherding, and was now well-nigh idiotic; but with such assistance as Catherine could give him, he did manage to hew the wood and draw the water.

Then one day a great announcement was made to her. "Next week John Carmichael will be here."

"John!"

"Yes; why not John? He will have that room. If he wants a bed, he

must bring it with him."When this was said November had come round again, and it wanted about six weeks to Christmas.

CHRISTMAS DAY. NO. 2.

JOHN CARMICHAEL was to come! And she understood that he was to come there as a resident;—for Peter had spoken of the use of that bedroom as though it were to be permanent. With no direct telling, but by degrees, something of the circumstances of the run at Warriwa had become known to her. There were on it 15,000 sheep, and these, with the lease of the run, were supposed to be worth £15,000. The sheep and all were the property of her husband. Some years ago he had taken John, when he was a boy, to act with him as his foreman or assistant, and the arrangement had been continued till the quarrel had sprung up. Peter had more than once declared his purpose of leaving all that he possessed to the young man, and John had never doubted his word. But, in return for all this future wealth, it was expected, not only that the lad should be his slave, but that the lad, grown into a man, should remain so as long as Peter might live. As Peter was likely to live for the next twenty years, and as the slavery was hard to bear, John had quarrelled with his kinsman, and had gone away to the diggings. Now , it seemed, the quarrel had been arranged, and John was to come back to Warriwa. That some one was needed to ride round among the four or five shepherds,—

some one beyond Peter himself,—some one to overlook the shearing, some one to attend to the young lambs, some one to see that the water-holes did not run dry, had become manifest even to Kate herself. It had leaked out from Peter's dry mouth that some one must come, and now she was told that John Carmichael would return to his old home.

Though she hated her husband, Kate knew what was due to him. Hating him as she had learned to do, hating him as she acknowledged to herself that she did, still she had endeavoured to do her duty by him. She could not smile upon him, she could not even speak to him with a kind voice; but she could make his bed, and iron his shirts, and cook his dinner, and see that the things confided to her charge were not destroyed by the old woman or the idiot boy. Perhaps he got from her all he wanted to get. He did not complain that her voice was not loving. He was harsh, odious in his ways with her, sometimes almost violent; but it may be doubted whether he would have been less so had she attempted to turn him by any show of false affection. She had learned to feel that if she served him she did for him all that he required, and that duty demanded no more. But now! would not duty demand more from her now?

Since she had been brought home to Warriwa, she had given herself up freely to her thoughts, telling herself boldly that she hated her husband, and that she loved that other man. She told herself, also, that there was no breach of duty in this. She would never again see

that other man. He had crossed her path and had gone. There was nothing for her left in the world, except her husband Peter and Warriwa. As for her hating the one man, not to do that would be impossible. As for loving the other man, there was nothing in it but a dream. Her thoughts were her own, and therefore she went on loving him. She had no other food for her thoughts, except the hope that death might come to her, and some vague idea that that last black fast-running river, over which she had been ferried in the dark, might perhaps be within her reach, should death be too long in coming of its own accord. With such thoughts running across her brain, there was, she thought, no harm in loving John Carmichael,—till now, when she was told that John was to be brought there to live under the same roof with her.

Now there must be harm in it! Now there would be crime in loving him! And yet she knew that she could not cease to love him because he should be there, meeting her eye every day. How comely he was, with that soft brown hair of his, and the broad, open brow, and the smile that would curl round his lips! How near they had once been to swearing that they would be each all things to the other! “Kate !” he had said, “Kate!” as she had stood close to him, fastening a button to his shirt. Her finger had trembled against his neck, and she knew that he had felt the quiver. The children had come upon them at the moment, and no other word had been said. Then Peter had come there,—Peter who was to be her husband,—and after that John Carmichael had spoken no word at all to her. Though he had been so

near to loving her while her finger had touched him in its trembling, all that had passed away when Peter came. But it had not passed away from her heart, nor would she be able to stifle it when he should be there, sitting daily at the same board with her. Though the man himself was so odious, there was something sacred to her in the name of husband,—something very sacred to her in the name of wife. “Why should he be coming?” she said to her husband the day after the announcement had been made to her, when twenty-four hours for thinking had been allowed to her.

“Because it suits,” he said, looking up at her from the columns of a dirty account-book , in which he was slowly entering figures.

What could she say to him that might be of avail? How much could she say to him? Should she tell him everything, and then let him do as he pleased? It was in her mind to do so, but she could not bring herself to speak the words. He would have thought—! Oh! what might he not have thought! There was no dealing in fair words with one so suspicious, so unmanly, so inhuman.

“It won’t suit,” she said, sullenly.

“Why not? what have you got to do with it?”

“It won ’t suit; he and I will be sure to,—sure to,—sure to have words.”

“Then you must have ’em. Ain’t he my cousin? Do you expect me to

be riding round among them lying, lazy varmint every day of my life, while you sit at home twiddling your thumbs?" Here she knew that allusion was made both to the sheep and to the shepherds. "If anything happens to me, who do you think is to have it all after me?" One day at Hokitika he had told her coarsely that it was a good thing for a young woman to marry an old man, because she would be sure to get every thing when he was dead. "I suppose that's why you don't like John," he added, with a sneer.

"I do like him," she said, with a clear, loud voice; "I do like him." Then he leered round at her, shaking his head at her, as though declaring that he was not to be taken in by her devices, and after that he went on with his figures.

Before the end of November John arrived. Something, at any rate, she could do for his comfort. Wherever she got them, there, when he came, were the bed and bedstead for his use. At first she asked simply after her brothers. They had been tempted to go off to other diggings in New South Wales, and he had not thought well to follow them. "Sheep is better nor gold, Jack," said Peter, shaking his head and leering.

She tried to be very silent with him;—but she succeeded so far that her very silence made him communicative. In her former intercourse she had always talked the most,—a lass of that age having always more to say for herself than a lad. But now he seemed to struggle to find chance opportunities. As a rule he was always out early in the

morning on horseback, and never home till Peter was there also. But opportunities would, of course, be forthcoming. Nor would it be wise that she should let him feel that she avoided them. It was not only necessary that Peter should not suspect, but that John too should be kept in the dark. Indeed, it might be well that Peter should suspect a little. But if he were to suspect,—that other he,—and then he were to speak out, how should she answer him?

“Kate,” he said to her one day, “do you ever think of Hokitika?”

“Think, indeed!—of the place where father and mother lie.”

“But of the time when you and I used to fight it out for them? I used not to think in those days, Kate, that you would ever be over here,—mistress of Warriwa.”

“No, indeed , nobody would have thought it.”

“But Kate—”

It was clearly necessary that she should put an end to these reminiscences, difficult, as it might be to do so, “John,” she said, “I think you’d better make a change.”

“What change?”

She struggled not to blush as she answered him, and she succeeded. “I was a girl in those days, but now I’m a married woman. You had better not call me Kate any more.”

“Why? what’s the harm?”

“Harm! no, there’s no harm; but it isn’t the proper thing when a young woman’s married, unless he be her brother, or her cousin at furthest; you don’t call me by my name before him,”

“Didn ’t I?”

“No, you call me nothing at all. What you do before him, you must do behind his back.”

“And we were such friends!” But as she could not stand this, she left the room and did not come back from the kitchen till Peter had returned.

So a month went on, and still there was the word Kate sounding in her ears whenever the old man’s back was turned. And it sounded now as it sounded on that one day when her finger was trembling at his throat. Why not give way to the sound! Why not ill-treat the man who had so foully ill-treated her? What did she owe to him but her misery? What had he done for her but make a slave of her? And why should she, living there in the wild prairie, beyond the ken of other women, allow herself to be trammelled by the laws which the world had laid down for her sex? To other women the world made some return for true obedience. The love of one man, the strong protecting arm of one true friend, the consciousness of having one to buckler her against the world, one on whom she might hang with trust! This was what other women have in return for truth;—but was any of this

given to her when he would turn round and leer at her, reminding her by his leer that he had caught her and made a slave of her? And then there was this young man, sweeter to her now than ever, and clearer! As she thought of all this she came suddenly,—in a moment,—to a resolution, striking her hand violently on the table as she did so. She must tell her husband everything. She must do that, or else she must become a false wife.

As she thought of that possibility of being false, an ecstasy of sweetness for a moment pervaded her senses. To throw herself on his bosom and tell him that she loved him would be compensation almost sufficient to the misery of the last twelve months. Then the word wife crept into her ears, and she remembered words that she had read as to woman's virtue. She thought of her father and her mother! And how would it be with her when, after a while, she would awake from her dream? She had sat silent for an hour alone, now melting into softness, and then rousing herself to all the strength of womanhood. At last a frown came across her brow, very dark; and then, dashing her clenched hand down upon the table, she expressed her purpose in spoken words: "I will tell it him all!"

Then she told him all, after her fashion. It was the custom of the two men to go forth together almost at dawn, and it was her business to prepare their meal for them before they went. On the first morning after her resolution had been formed, she bade her husband stay awhile. She had thought to say it in the seclusion of their own room;

but she had felt that it would be better that John should not be in the house when it was spoken. Peter stayed at her bidding, looking eagerly into her face, as she stood at the back door watching till the young man had started on his horse. Then she turned round to her husband. “He must go away from this,” she said, pointing over her shoulder to the retreating figure of the horseman.

“Why is he to go? What has he been and done?” This last question he asked, lowering his voice to a whisper, as though thinking that she had detected his cousin in some delinquency.

There was a savage purpose in her heart to make the revelation as bitter to him as it might be. He must know her own purity, but he must know also her thorough contempt for himself. There was no further punishment that he could inflict upon her, save that of thinking her to be false. Though he were to starve her, beat her, murder her, she would care for that not at all. He had carried her away helpless to his foul home, and all that was left her was to preserve herself strong against disgrace.

“He is a man, a young man, and I am a woman. You had better let him go.” Then he stood for a while with his mouth open, holding her by the arm, not looking at her, but with his eyes fixed on the spot whence his cousin was disappearing. After a moment or two, his lips came together and produced a long low whistle. He still clutched her, and still looked out upon the far-retreating figure; but he was for a while as though he had been stricken dumb. “You had better let

him go," she repeated. Then he whispered some word into her ear. She threw up the arm that he was holding so violently that he was forced to start back from her, and to feel how much stronger she was than he, should she choose to put out her strength. "I tell you all,",she said, "that you have to know. Little as you deserve, you have fallen into honest hands. Let him go."

"And he hasn't said a word?"

"I have told you all that you are to hear."

"I would kill him."

"If you are beast enough to accuse him, he will kill you;—or I will do it, if you ever tell him what I have said to you. Bid him go; and let that be all." Then she turned away from him, and passing through the house, crossed the verandah, and went out upon the open space on the other side. He lingered about the place for half an hour, but did not follow her. Then he mounted his old horse, and rode away across the prairie after his sheep.

"Have you told him?" she said, that night when they were alone.

"Told him what?"

"That he must go." He shook his head, not angrily, but in despair. Since that morning he had learned to be afraid ot her. "If you do not," she said very slowly, looking him full in the face— "if you do not—I will. He shall be told to-night, before he goes to his bed."

“Am I to say that he—that he-?” As he endeavoured to ask the question, he was white with despair.

“You are to say nothing to him but that he must quit Warriwa at once. If you will say that, he will understand you.”

What took place between the two men on the next day she did not know. It may be doubted whether she would ever know it. Peter said not a word further to her on the matter. But on the morning of the second day there was the buggy, ready, and Peter with it, prepared to drive his cousin away. It was apparent to her that her husband had not dared to say an evil word of her, nor did she believe that he suspected her. She felt that, poor a creature as he was, she had driven him to respect her. But the thing was settled as she would have it, and the young man was to go.

During those last two days there was not a word spoken between her and John, unless when she handed him his food. When he was away across tho land she took care that not a stitch should be wanting to his garments. She washed his things and, laid them smooth for him in his box,—oh, with such loving hands! As she kneeled down to her work, she looked round to the door of the room to see that it was closed, and to the window, lest the eyes of that old woman should be prying in; and then she stooped low, and burying her face beneath the lid, kissed the linen which her hands had smoothed. This she could do, and not feel herself disgraced;—but when the morning came she could let him go and not speak a word. She came out

before he was up and prepared the breakfast, and then went back to her own room, so that they two might eat it together and then start. But he could not bring himself to go without one word of farewell. “Say good-bye, at any rate,” he sobbed, standing at her door, which opened out upon the verandah. Peter the while was looking on with a lighted pipe in his mouth.

“Good-bye, John.” The words were heard, but the sobs were almost hidden.

“Give me your hand,” said he. Then there came forth a hand,—nothing but a hand. He took it in his, and for a moment thought that he would touch it with his lips. But he felt,—feeling like a man,—that it behoved him to spare her all he could. He pressed it in his grasp for a moment, and then the hand disappeared.

“If we are to go, we might as well be off,” said Peter. So they mounted the buggy and went away.

The nearest town to Warriwa was a place called Timaru, through which a coach, running from Dunedin to Christchurch, passed three times a week. This was forty miles off, and here was transacted what business was necessary for the carrying on of the sheep-station. Stores were bought at Timaru, such as sugar, tea, and flour, and here Peter Carmichael generally sold his wool. Here was the bank at which he kept his money, and in which his credit always stood high. There were not many journeys made from Warriwa to Timaru; but

when one became necessary it was always a service of pleasure to Peter. He could, as it were, finger his money by looking at the bank which contained it, and he could learn what might probably be the price which the merchants would give him for his next clip. On this occasion he seemed to be quite glad of an excuse for driving into Timaru, though it can hardly be imagined that he and his companion were pleasant to each other in the buggy. From Warriwa the road, or track rather, was flat the whole way to Timaru. There was nothing to be seen on either way but a long everlasting plain of grey, stunted, stony grass. At Warriwa the outlines of the distant mountains were just visible in the west, but the traveller, as he went eastward towards the town and the road, soon lost sight of the hills, and could see nothing but the grey plain. There were, however, three rivers to be passed, the Warriwa, and two others, which, coming down from the north-west, ran into the Warriwa. Of these the Warriwa itself was the widest, and the deepest, and the fastest. It was in crossing this, within ten miles of her home,—crossing it after dark,—that Catherine had thought how well it would be that the waters should pass over her head, so that she might never see that home. Often, since that, she had thought how well it would have been for her had she been saved from the horrors of her home by the waters of the river.

We may suppose that very little was said by the two men as they made their way into Timaru. Peter was one who cared little for conversation, and could be quite content to sit for hours together in

his buggy, calculating the weight of his wool, and the money which would come from it. At Timaru they dined together, still, we may say, without many words. Then the coach came, and John Carmichael was carried away,—whither his cousin did not even inquire. There was some small money transaction between them, and John was carried away to follow out his own fortune.

Had it been possible Peter would have returned at once, so as to save expense, but the horses made it necessary that he should remain that night in the town. And, having done so, he stayed the greater part of the following day, looking after his money and his wool, and gathering his news. At about two he started, and made his way back over the two smaller rivers in safety. At the Warriwa there was but one ferryman, and in carrying a vehicle with horses over it was necessary that the man in charge of them should work also. On the former day, though the rivers had been very high, there had been daylight, and John Carmichael had been there. Now it was pitch dark, though it was in the middle of summer, and the waters were running very strong. The ferryman refused at first to put the buggy on the raft, bidding old Carmichael wait till the next morning. It was Christmas Eve, he said, and he did not care to be drowned on Christmas Eve.

Nor was such to be his destiny. But it was the destiny of Peter Carmichael. The waters went over him and one of his horses. At three o’clock in the morning his body was brought home to

Warriwa, lying across the back of the other. The ferryman had been unable to save the man's life, but had got the body, and had brought it home to the young widow just twelve months after the day on which she had become a wife.

CHRISTMAS DAY. NO. 3.

THERE she was, on the morning of that Christmas Day, with the ferryman and that old woman, with the half-idiot boy, and the body of her dead husband! She was so stunned that she sat motionless for hours, with the corpse close to her, lying stretched out on the verandah, with a sheet over it. It is a part of the cruelty of the life which is lived in desolate places, far away, that when death comes, the small incidents of death are not mitigated to the sufferer by the hands of strangers. If the poorest wife here at home becomes a widow, some attendant hands will close the glazed eye and cover up the limbs, and close the coffin which is there at hand; and then it will be taken away and hidden for ever. There is an appropriate spot, though it be but under the poorhouse wall. Here there was no appropriate spot, no ready hand, no coffin, no coroner with his authority, no parish officer ready with his directions. She sat there numb, motionless, voiceless, thinking where John Carmichael might be. Could it be that he would come back to her, and take from her that ghastly duty of getting rid of the object that was lying within a

yard or two of her arm?

She tried to weep, telling herself that, as a wife now widowed, she was bound to weep for her husband. But there was not a tear, nor a sob, nor a moan. She argued it with herself, saying that she would grieve for him now that he was dead. But she could not grieve,—not for that; only for her own wretchedness and desolation. If the waters had gone over her instead of him, then how merciful would heaven have been to her! The misery of her condition came home to her with its full weight,—her desolation, her powerlessness, her friendlessness, the absence of all interest in life, of all reason for living; but she could not induce herself to say, even to herself, that she was struck with anguish on account of him. That voice, that touch, the cunning leer of that eye, would never trouble her again. She had been freed from something. She became angry with herself because it was in this way that she regarded it; but it was thus that she continued to regard it. She had threatened once to kill him,—to kill him should he speak a word as to which she bade him to be silent. Now he was dead,—whether he had spoken that word or not. Then she wondered whether he had spoken it, and she wondered, also, what John Carmichael would say or do when he should hear that his kinsman was no more. So she sat motionless for hours within her room, but with the door open on to the verandah, and the feet of the corpse within a few yards of her chair.

The old ferryman took the horse, and went out under the boy’s

guidance in quest of the shepherds. Distances are large on these sheep-runs, and a shepherd with his flock is not always easily found. It was nearly evening before he returned with two of these men, and then they dug the grave,—not very far away, as the body must be carried in their arms; and then they buried him, putting up a rough palisade around the spot to guard it, if it might be so guarded for a while, from the rats. She walked with them as they carried it, and stood there as they did their work; and the old woman went with them, helping a little. But the widow spoke not a word, and then returning, seated herself again in the same chair. Not once did there come to her the relief of a tear, or even of a sob.

The ferryman went back to his river, and the shepherds to their sheep, and the old woman and the boy remained with her, preparing what food was eaten. The key of the store-room was now in her possession, having been taken out of his pocket before they laid him in his grave, and they could do what they pleased with what it contained. So she remained for a fortnight, altogether inactive, having as yet resolved upon nothing. Thoughts no doubt there were running through her mind. What was now to become of her? To whom did the place belong, and the sheep, and the money, which, as she knew, was lying in the bank? It had all been promised to John, before her marriage. Then the old man had hinted to her, in his coarse way, that it would be hers. Then he had hinted again that John was to be brought back, and to live here. How would it be? Without the speaking of words, even to herself, it was settled in her heart that

John Carmichael should be, ought to be, must be, the owner of Warriwa. Then how different would Warriwa become? But she strove gallantly against feeling that, for herself, there would be any personal interest in such a settlement. She would have kept her thoughts away from that if it had been possible;—if it had been possible.

At the end of a fortnight there came out to her from Timaru a young man, who declared himself to be the clerk of a solicitor established there, and this young man brought with him a letter from the manager of the bank. The purport of the letter was this:
Mr. Carmichael, as he had passed through Timaru on his way home from Christchurch after his marriage, had then executed a will, which he had deposited at the bank. In this he had named the manager as his sole executor, and had left everything of which he was possessed to his wife. The writer of the letter then went on to explain that there might have been a subsequent will made. He was aware that John Carmichael had been again, at Warriwa, and it was possible that Peter Carmichael might have reverted to his old intention of making his kinsman his heir. There had been a former will to that effect, which had been destroyed in the presence of the banker. There was no such document at Timaru. If anywhere, it must be at Warriwa. Would Mrs. Carmichael allow the young man to search? If no such document could be found, the money and the property would be hers. It would be well that she should return with the young man to the town, and take up her abode there in lodgings

for a few weeks till things should have settled themselves.

And thus she found herself mistress of Warriwa, owner of the sheep, and possessor of all the money. Of course, she obeyed the counsel given her, and went into the town. No other will was found; no other claimant came forward. Week after week went by, and month after month, very slowly, and at the end of six months she found that everything was undoubtedly hers. An agent had been hired, to live at Warriwa, and her signature was recognized at the bank as commanding all that money. The sum seemed so large that it was a wonder to her that the old man should have lived in such misery at home. Then two of her brothers came to her, across from New South Wales. They had come to her because she was alone. No, they said; they did not want her help, though a little money would go a long way with them. They had come because she was alone.

Then she laid a task upon them, and told them her plans. Yes; she had been very much alone;—altogether without counsel in this particular matter; but she had formed her plans. If they would assist her, no doubt they would be compensated for their time. Where was John Carmichael? They had not heard of John Carmichael since they had left him when they went away from Hokitika.

Thereupon she explained to them that none of all that property was hers:—that none of it all should ever be hers; that, to her view of the matter, the station, with the run, and the sheep, and the money, all belonged to John Carmichael. When they told her that she had been

the man's wife, and, therefore, much nearer than John Carmichael, she only shook her head. She could not explain to them her thoughts and feelings. She could not say to them that she would not admit herself to have been the wife of a man whom she had ever hated,—for whom, not for a single moment, had she ever entertained anything of wifely feeling. "I am here ," she said, "only as his care-taker;—only as such will I ever spend a farthing of the money" Then she showed them a letter, of which she had sent copies addressed to him at the post-offices of various towns in New Zealand, having, spent many of her hours in making the copies, and the letter was as follows:—

"If you will return to Warriwa, you will find that everything has been kept for you as well as I have known how to keep it. The sheep are nearly up to the number. The money is at the bank at Timaru, except a very little which I have taken to pay the wages and just to support myself,—till I can go away and leave it all. You should hurry to Warriwa, because I cannot go away till you come. CATHERINE."

It was not, perhaps, a very wise letter. An advertisement in the New Zealand papers would have done better, and have cost less trouble. But that was her way of setting about her work,—till her brothers had come to her, and then she sent them forth upon her errand. It was in vain that they argued with her. They were to go and find him, and send him,—not to her,—but to Warriwa. On his arrival he

should find that everything was ready for him. There would be some small thing for the lawyer to arrange, but that could be arranged at once. When the elder brother asked at the bank about his sister, the manager told him that all Timaru had failed to understand the purposes of the heiress. That old Peter Carmichael had been a miser, everybody had known, and that a large sum was lying in the bank, and that the sheep were out on the run at Warriwa. They knew, too, that the widow had inherited it all. But they could not understand why she should be careful with the money as old Peter had been; why she should live there in lodgings, seeing no one; why she should be taken out to Warriwa once a month; and why on these occasions she should remain there a day or two, going through every figure, as it was said that she did do. If she liked the life of a squatter, why did she not live there and make the place comfortable? If, as was more probable, the place could hardly be delightful to her, why not sell it, and go away among her friends? There would be friends enough now to make her welcome. For, though she had written the letters, and sent them out, one or two at a time, she had told no one of her purpose till her brothers came to her. Then the banker understood it all, and the brothers probably understood something also.

They got upon his traces at last, and found him in Queensland, up to his throat in mud, looking for gold in a gully. “Luck? Yes; he had got a little, and spent the most of it. There was gold, no doubt, but he was not much in love with the spot.” ’Tis always thus the wandering

gold-digger speaks of his last adventure. When they told him that Peter Carmichael was dead, he jumped out of the gully, leaving the cradle behind him in which he had been washing the dirt, searching for specks of gold. “And Warriwa?” he said. Then they explained the nature of the will. “And the money, too?” Yes; the money also had been left to the widow. “It would have been hers any way,” he said, “whether he left a will or not. Well, well! So Kate is a rich woman.” Then he jumped into the gully again, and went to work at his cradle. By degrees they explained it all to him,—as much, at least, as they could explain. He must go to Warriwa. She would do nothing till he had been there.

“She says it is to be all yours,” said the younger brother.

“Don’t you say no more than you know,” said the elder. “Let him go and find it out for himself.”

“But Kate said so.”

“Kate is a woman, and may change her mind as well as another. Let him go and find it out for himself.” So he sold his claim at the gully for what little it would fetch, and started off once again for New Zealand and Warriwa.

He had himself landed at Dunedin in order that he might not be seen and questioned in passing through Timaru, and from Dunedin he made his way across the country direct to Warriwa. I need not trouble my readers with New Zealand geography, but at a little place

called Oamaru he hired a buggy and a pair of horses, and had himself driven across the country to the place. He knew that Catherine was living in the town, and not at the station; but even though the distance were forty miles, he thought that it would be better to send for her than to discuss such things as would have to be discussed before the bankers and the attorney, and all the eager eyes and ears of Timaru. What it was that he would have to discuss he hardly yet knew; but he did know, or thought that he knew, that he had been banished from Warriwa because old Peter Carmichael had not chosen to have "a young fellow like that hopping about round his wife." It was thus that Peter had explained his desire in that matter of John's departure. Now he had been sent for, because of the property. The property was the property of the widow. He did not in the least doubt that. Christmas had again come round, and it was just a year, —a year and a day,—since she had put her hand out to him through the closed door and had bade him good-bye.

There she was, when he entered the house, sitting at that little side-table, with the very books before her at which Peter had spent so many of his hours. "Kate," he said, as he entered, "I have come, you see,—because you sent for me."

She jumped up, rushing at him, as though to throw her arms round him, forgetting,—forgetting that there had been no love spoken between them. Then she stopped herself, and stood a moment looking at him. "John," she said, "John Carmichael, I am so glad you

have come at last. I am tired minding it,—very tired, and I know that I do not do it as it should be."

"Do what, Kate?"

"Mind it all,—for you. No one else could do it, because I had to sign the papers. Now you have come, and may do as you please with it. Now you have come,—and I may go."

"He left it to you; all of it,—the money, and the sheep, and the station."

Then there came a frown across her brow,—not of anger, but of perplexity. How should she explain it? How should she let him know that it must be as she would have it,—that he must have it all; and have it not from her, but as heir to his kinsman? How could she do all this and teach him at the same time that there need be nothing of gratitude in it all,—nothing certainly of love?

"John," she said, "I will not take it from him as his widow. I never loved him. I never had a kindly feeling towards him. It would kill me to take it. I will not have it. It must be yours."

"And you?"

"I will go away."

"Whither will you go? Where will you live?" Then she stood there dumb before him, frowning at him. What was it to him where she

might go? She thought of the day when she had sewn the button on his shirt, when he might have spoken to her. And she remembered, too, how she had prepared his things for him, when he had been sent away, at her bidding, from Warriwa. What was it to him what might become of her ?

“I am tired of this,” she said. “You must come to Timaru, so that the lawyer may do what is necessary. There must be papers prepared. Then I will go away.”

“Kate!” She only stamped her foot. “Kate,—why was it that he made me go?”

“He could not bear to have people about the place, eating and drinking.”

“Was it that?”

“Or perhaps he hated you. It is easy, I think, to hate in a place so foul as this.”

“And not easy to love?”

“I have had no chance of loving. But what is the use of all that? Will you do as I bid you?”

“What!—take it all from your hands?”

“No ; not from mine,—from his. I will not take it, coming to me

from him. It is not mine, and I cannot give it; but it is yours. You need not argue, for it must, be so." Then she turned away, as though going;—but she knew not whither to go, and stopped at the end of the verandah, looking towards the spot at which the grave was marked by the low railings.

There she stood for some minutes before she stirred. Then he followed her, and, laying his hand upon her shoulder, spoke the one word which was necessary. "Kate, will you take it, if not from him, then from me?" She did not answer him at once, and then his arm was passed round her waist. "If not from him, then from me ?

"Yes; from you," she said. "Anything from you." And so it was.